



185 East Flat Hill Road  
Southbury, CT 06488  
Tel: 301-704-5235  
[www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)

February 16, 2017

Dear Chairman Formica, Chairwoman Osten, Chairwoman Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Audubon Connecticut is the state program of the National Audubon Society representing six local Chapters and over 10,000 members across the state. Our mission is the protection of birds and the places they need for today and tomorrow. Our approach to that work involves us in a wide array of environmental, wildlife conservation, and human health concerns.

The testimony we are providing today focuses on the budget of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and our concerns about continued reductions in general revenue allocations for this critical agency. As in years past, we recognize the budget constraints faced by this Committee. However, there are four critical observations we'd like the Committee to keep in mind as it reviews the proposed budget for DEEP programs.

First, the likely impact of continued reductions would be a drastic reduction in seasonal staff that work in our state parks. Losing this staff would not only have dire consequences for our state parks, but the reductions would have one further effect—an inability to collect the park admission and other fees provided by the over 1 million individuals who visit our parks each year. These cuts would ripple through the agency, and also have negative impacts on an array of wildlife protection and environmental quality programs.

Second, as has been advocated by a variety of Connecticut conservation organizations, the good news is that there are a variety of new mechanisms that can be adopted that would generate revenue based on the visitation to state parks and the importance of these parks to Connecticut citizens. One such proposal would provide a park passport to all those who register vehicles in Connecticut. The passport would be \$5 per year, it would protect our parks, and it would allow Connecticut citizens free access to all parks and reduce the wait time for Connecticut citizens to enter the parks, a key benefit especially during the busy summer months. There are other possible revenue generation mechanisms. We will be advocating the Finance Revenue and Bonding Committee to ask that they consider adopting revenue generation initiatives as a key alternative to drastic and continued cuts to DEEP programs. Doing this would not only protect our parks, it would also preserve the agency's ability to provide the environmental quality, clean air and clean water, and wildlife conservation and open space initiatives and other programs we depend on to protect the nature of Connecticut.

Third, the Council on Environmental Quality provides an array of services that are a complement to the programs that DEEP provides. Each year, CEQ produces a reliable and valuable independent analysis of trends in environmental issues in our state and this helps guide the implementation not only of public programs through DEEP, but non-profit and private sector efforts as well. It is vital to protect CEQ from being eliminated and preserve adequate funding levels. The Council is already doing more with less.

On a final note, we will continue to advocate for the protection of the Community Investment Act from potential disproportionate cuts. The CIA is the only dedicated fund intended to support investments in Open Space, Farmland/Dairy Support, Historic Preservation and Affordable Housing. Disproportionate cuts could seriously jeopardize the future of the program and the reinvestment opportunity in our communities.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to working with you.

Genese Leach  
Policy Manager, Direct Phone: 860-716-1723